

Edinburgh's "most spectacular outdoor dining space" launched



The stunning decking area with non-slip panels at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Picture by Nigel Duncan Media

It is no surprise that visitor numbers at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) are within touching distance of one million a year.

The garden is an green oasis away from the bustle of central Edinburgh, yet it is within a 20 minute walk – downhill – from Princes Street.

Strolling through the space, which was founded in 1670 as a physic garden, is a pleasure, particularly on a still night, and it is easy to see why so many people come regularly.

One man was sitting on a bench with his eyes closed, contemplating, a woman was reading a book, excited children were playing, I nodded to several groups sitting in the late evening sunshine chatting. This is a wonderful place to be.

On previous visits I've noted artists capturing the plants on canvas and photographers delighting in the colour and the diversity of plantlife on their doorstep.

The RBGE is a world-renowned centre for plant science, horticulture and education and extends over four gardens (Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan) boasting a rich living collection of plants.

The vision, explained Simon Milne, Regius Keeper, is to explore, conserve and explain the world of plants for a better

future

Put simply, without plants, there would be no life on earth.

But there is another side to RBGE which has been growing and studying plants for more than 330 years.

Aside from their world class Living Collection, Herbarium and Library, there is a business to run.

Mr Milne explained that they are continuing to explore ideas to increase visitor numbers.

Their portfolio of events includes an annual winter light show, which is stunning, and the board is also looking to extend its corporate business.

Along with caterers Sodexo they have invested heavily in the John Hope Gateway, the largest event space on-site with a capacity for up to 250 for a seated dinner or 400 for a standing reception and BBQ.

It is available for evening events with access to a large, decked area (with non-slip panels) overlooking the biodiversity garden.

It was there that Sodexo hosted a reception to spread the word that the re-furbishment was over and that the John Hope – with a new outdoor kitchen serving a movable feast which includes pizza and burgers – was now fully open.

Fraser Sharp, general manager of Sodexo, Prestige Venues and Events, believes that the decking area outside the restaurant in the John Hope Gateway at the main entrance to the garden is the most spectacular outdoor dining space in Scotland's Capital.